

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

UNITED STATES FORWARD MILITARY PRESENCE IN EUROPE...A STRATEGIC NECESSITY

by

LIEUTENANT COLONEL THURMAN M. PITTMAN
United States Army

Professor Bill Lord
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

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ABSTRACT

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The United States has over 100,000 men and women of its armed forces currently stationed in or serving around the European Continent. This research paper examined the requirement for a continued United States forward military presence within Europe from a strategic viewpoint to determine if said presence is strategically necessary and vital to United States interests. Research and analysis lead to the conclusion that the United States needs to continue its forward military presence in Europe. This recommendation is based on the following benefits of a forward military presence in Europe: expeditious access into that region of the world; basis for cooperation between European countries and the United States; the ability to influence events in that region of the world; an exercised and measured military inter-operability capability; and strategic flexibility in support of the war on terrorism and confrontations with rogue nations in the surrounding area. These advantages, when weighed against the disadvantages (potential entanglement in European affairs; legal concerns; force protection issues; and disincentive for Europe to invest in defense) provide overwhelming benefits and justify a continued United States forward military presence in Europe.

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UNITED STATES FORWARD MILITARY PRESENCE IN EUROPE...A STRATEGIC NECESSITY

The purpose of this research paper is to examine the requirement for a United States forward military presence within Europe from a strategic viewpoint to determine whether or not maintaining European bases and stations with their corresponding “boots on the ground” is a strategic necessity and vital to United States interests. Prior to doing so it is necessary to set the proper stage by reviewing the United States national security policy and its objectives.

The United States current national security policy calls for the forward deployment or presence of United States military forces in regions deemed unstable and/or of vital interest.¹ This is a clear and simply put requirement directed by the President of the United States. While it may be debated how stable Europe is at this time, whether or not it is of vital interest to the United States is unarguable. Having fought three wars (World War I, World War II and the Cold War) on the European Continent and in consideration of the economic links between the United States and Europe, the United States is tied to the Continent by our previous support, current treaty obligations and future economic prospects.² Additionally, the United States needs a strategic partner in order to conduct the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), combat weapons of mass destruction proliferation and provide a forward defense to minimize United States vulnerabilities.³ The bottom line is that the United States has and will continue to view the European Continent as an area of vital interest. Given that global terrorism is currently the main threat confronting the United States, in consideration of the geostrategic benefits Europe provides and European reliability/predictability (in light of other potential partners) the United States can not afford to do otherwise.⁴

The United States national security policy objectives identify the need to work with and assist others to mitigate regional conflicts.⁵ There is much work to be done in Europe, given the propensity for instability in countries contiguous to NATO allies and the need to assist Russia transform to a democratic and economic self-sufficient entity. In light of this, it is both logical and easy to understand why the United States national security policy states the need to maintain “bases and stations within and beyond Western Europe”.⁶ Given the order to maintain these “bases and stations” within Europe, the United States must man these facilities with its military forces.

BACKGROUND

At the conclusion of World War II, the United States was faced with the dilemma of returning to an isolationist strategy or embracing the mantle of a "Great Power" with its inherent world-wide responsibilities. With the advent of the communist threat and the vulnerability of a post-war Europe, the United States determined that to achieve its destiny of being a "Great Power" necessitated the assumption of European defense responsibilities to preclude Europe's defeat if Soviet forces attacked.⁷ While these words are simply written, the United States chose this path after much congressional debate and with deliberateness. In the previous 150 years of its existence the United States, while not purely isolationist in fact and actions, had remembered well President George Washington's admonishment in his farewell address that "our true policy is to steer clear of permanent alliances".⁸ Under the auspices of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and upon ratification of the treaty by Congress in 1949, the United States turned its back on an isolationist policy and set the stage for our current military presence in Europe.⁹

As a point of reference, it is essential to understand that there was never an intent to leave United States military forces behind in Germany after WWII.¹⁰ During the NATO Treaty ratification process, relevant to the treaty's acceptance by both the United States Senate and population was the understanding that the treaty required no forward military presence.¹¹ Proponents of NATO felt that once Europe's economies had recovered from their post WWII malaise, there was no reason that United States military forces could not return to the United States.¹² Even at the height of the Cold War, when it appeared war with Russia was imminent, America's policy was that there would not be a permanent military presence in Europe.¹³ It is only because of the ebb and flow of the Cold War that we retained military forces in Europe; primarily to provide the assurance that if necessary the United States was prepared to fight any aggressor.

Since joining NATO there have been numerous calls to reduce our military presence in Europe by various congressional leaders. In fact, immediately after ratification the clamoring for a return to "Fortress America" began.¹⁴ It is interesting to note that the basis for these arguments consisted of: the need to prevent the United States from entanglement in foreign affairs; Status of Forces Agreements that threaten United States service member's basic rights; the authority to involve the United States in a war in Europe; and the free ride that Europe is getting from American defense at the expense of American taxpayers.¹⁵ While vitriolic and emotional at times, the argument today is essentially over dollars and cents. The fact that American taxpayers are financing a portion of Europe's defense makes a strong case to reduce

the United States presence in Europe. However, this is not a new argument as this “free-ride” has been occurring for all 54 years of NATO’s existence.¹⁶ While this 54 year precedent does not excuse the situation, the cost to American taxpayers must be measured against the United States current and future strategic requirements.

Aside from the need to “rollback” Communism in accordance with the Truman Doctrine, there is another historical aspect of the United States forward military presence in Europe that needs examining. During the 1960s and 1970s, the United States found itself and the world questioning its “Great Power” status.¹⁷ The Soviet initial successes in space and American failures in Vietnam, not to mention internal American social disarray, contributed to internal and external doubts about whether or not the United States continued to deserve the title of “Great Power”.¹⁸ In an effort to preserve this status and the influence such a title provided, the United States needed to demonstrate its ability to flex its military muscles. The only viable area was Europe and the United States elected to do so by maintaining its European based force structure during and after the post-Vietnam War draw down, thus creating an increased proportion of United States military forces committed to the defense of Europe.¹⁹ In doing so the United States demonstrated its ability and commitment to participate on the world stage.

ROLE OF NATO

From its beginnings, NATO’s purpose was to perform in both political and military roles.²⁰ NATO’s 54 years existence speaks well of its purpose and successes. It is essential to keep in mind that NATO is currently the dominant security and political organization in Europe.²¹ Evidence of NATO’s viability as a deterrent is that the execution of its first actual live military operation occurred 45 years into its existence and was outside NATO boundaries in Yugoslavia.²² Confronted with member nations not known to shrink away from national interests, these 54 years are testimony that both national and organizational needs are being met. This is not meant to denigrate the European Union (EU) or Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as both entities are effective participants in European political and security affairs. However, much work is needed if they are to overcome their internal bureaucratic turf battles.

With the end of the Cold War, the primary role of NATO to serve as a deterrent to a Soviet invasion became passé. While still fundamental to its charter, the issue is, deter what? With no viable threat to European security, NATO’s role became clouded. But out of these clouds a new role is emerging. This new role has NATO resolving religious, political and ethnic tensions; confronting terrorism; and containing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction

(WMD).²³ It is important to note that in this new role NATO is moving beyond its previous boundaries and embracing nations it previously geared its defenses against.

Emulating the values of its member nations, NATO's new role is in concert with American strategic objectives: work with others to defuse regional conflicts; champion aspirations for human dignity; support free markets and trade; and open societies by building the infrastructure of democracy.²⁴ As the alliance continues to project the core values of the American people such as freedom, human rights and democracy this new role is not at odds with the United States role as a "Great Power" nor with its perception of itself. However, the execution of this role and the means by which it does so is where contention lies.

FRICTION IN NATO

There are several issues confronting NATO member nations today that are creating friction and threaten to destabilize the organization. These issues are: the lack of burden sharing (primarily financial); inter-operability gaps; expansion of NATO membership; and the possibility of taking on "out of sector" missions.²⁵ The following paragraphs will discuss each of these issues.

The root of today's friction within NATO is an unclear definition of burden sharing or more precisely, the unequal distribution of the financial load.²⁶ With 19 (currently) member nations who all are emphatically nationalistic in behavior, the propensity for "load shirking" or cost avoidance tactics to materialize is no surprise. The cost and benefit to their nation state is always a consideration for a nation's government. Unlike most cases however, the ability to quantitatively express the degree of burden sharing, or lack thereof, among NATO member nations is available.

Although each member state of NATO is required to spend at least 2% of its GDP on its own defense; only the United States, France, England, Portugal and Hungary are meeting this requirement.²⁷ As a whole, defense spending within NATO decreased by 22% since 1992.²⁸ For the most part, NATO member countries are decrementing their force structure and/or reducing their budgets. The Netherlands, Italy and Belgium reduced their forces by 54%, 36% and 40% respectively.²⁹ The United Kingdom, Germany, and Netherlands have implemented funding reductions.³⁰ None of these actions bode well for resolution of the burden sharing issue tearing at the fabric of NATO. While the United States has likewise reduced force structure since the end of the Cold War, it is still meeting the 2% of GDP NATO requirement. The United States is incurring a tremendous cost to maintain its armed forces, a cost that is significantly higher than other NATO members. The United States spends twice as much on defense as all

other NATO members combined.³¹ The term burden sharing is ludicrous when used in the same breath as NATO; the United States is carrying the financial load as measured both by its financial expenditures on defense and by its range of military capabilities.

While burden sharing is an issue, it is not a new one. The United States has been carrying the financial burden within NATO since NATO's inception.³² Despite European nations within NATO implementing numerous defense improvement initiatives such as the: Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), Defense Capabilities Initiative (DCI), Partnership Coordination Cell (PCC), European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI) and European Defense Improvement Program (EDIP), the net result is no real increase in defense investment.³³ The reason for this is the means for those countries to increase defense spending is to either decrease social program spending or increase taxes. Given the significant tax burden European nations currently impose on their residents (in some cases more than 40%), any initiative to increase taxes is tantamount to political suicide.³⁴ Conversely, any attempt to remove social subsidies (free national health care or generous retirement benefits) is also fraught with political risk. Burdened with these expensive social programs, unwilling to raise taxes and confronted with a decreasing population base to provide for these programs, Europeans are rapidly finding themselves in a financial crisis.³⁵ On the bright side, the United States European allies are honoring their commitments to fund reconstruction efforts in the Balkans and in Kosovo.³⁶ Additionally, the majority of military forces in both the Balkans and Kosovo is being provided by our European allies.³⁷

This failure to invest in defense by our European allies is creating an even more critical issue, the inability of NATO members' armed forces to operate in conjunction with the United States. This inter-operability gap is due to significant capability differences between United States and other NATO members militaries. This difference is primarily due to United States technological advancements, which is a by product of defense investment. Clearly evident during the recent operations in Desert Storm and Kosovo; our European allies have had to face the stark truth that the United States military capability is years ahead of their capabilities.³⁸ With 80% of the air campaign in Kosovo performed by the United States there is definitely an out of balance situation at hand.³⁹ The irrelevancy of Europe's military is beginning to rear its head, due to the combination of Europe's failure to invest in defense and America's armed forces investing at an increased rate and in futuristic, leap ahead technologies.⁴⁰

The expansion of NATO is also creating friction; primarily due to the increased sphere of influence such an expansion mandates and the accompanying internal problems associated with these new members. As the organization expands from 16 members to 19 (currently), with

an additional seven nations on the cusp of becoming members, the ability to reach consensus on operations becomes harder and harder.⁴¹ It is unacceptable that one nation has the ability to veto an operation with its one vote. As evident by the frustrations during the Kosovo operation, the real issue is that these frustrations could lead to unilateral operations. When you have one country flying 80% of the air missions, as the United States was doing during the Kosovo campaign, and all member nations must agree on the targeting something must be done.⁴² Once the mission degrades to unilateral or minority action the risk of abrogating the alliance begins to rise.

Lastly, the changing role of NATO is also creating friction, especially within the United States. As NATO takes on “out of sector” missions, the United States may find itself supporting or asked to support a NATO operation not envisioned under the auspices of the NATO treaty.⁴³ An example of this is upon the terrorist attack on the United States, NATO countries voted unanimously to implement Article 5 of the NATO treaty, thus considering the attack on the United States an attack on NATO.⁴⁴ This vote was certainly more visceral in nature than a deliberate strategic effort by NATO, as evident by the ensuing discussion and sighs of relief when the United States entered Afghanistan without formal NATO assistance.⁴⁵ It is likely; however, that a scenario could occur which might require the United States to respond to a NATO proposal to engage outside the boundaries envisioned by the NATO treaty. Imagine, upon a terrorist attack against Germany by Indonesia, NATO implements Article 5. This, at face value, would require the United States to respond in some manner, but in a location far beyond NATO’s borders and certainly not within the intent of the NATO Treaty. In fairness; however, there is nothing in the NATO charter that requires any member nation to provide a specific force level or degree of support.⁴⁶ Each member nation determines its degree of participation.

EUROPE’S STRATEGIC VALUE

Although there is friction within NATO, the true strategic value of Europe is that it is the most reliable and predictable partner that the United States has in the world of nations. The United States and Europe share a commonality of values and both entities have mutual economic needs.⁴⁷ Additionally, Europe is the United States largest trading and investment partner and vice versa.⁴⁸ The economic links between Europe and the United States are strong ties that bind the two together.

Even more importantly, Europe is and will continue to be a platform to provide the United States with strategic flexibility and adaptability to confront destabilizing threats to not only Europe, but also threats to the United States.⁴⁹ In an assessment of roles on the world stage,

unlike the United States, European nations may or may not feel compelled to confront rogue nations.⁵⁰ Because of this hesitancy, European nations are dependant on the United States to confront threats to their national interests. During the 1991 Gulf War, only Italy, France and England provided combat power in support of operations to drive Iraq out of Kuwait.⁵¹ This example, where all European nations were at risk of losing their access to the oil necessary to fuel their economies is a powerful signal and one that must not be ignored. In view of this dependency, the United States values the strategic flexibility Europe provides during the conduct of military operations in that region of the world. Given that threats to European national interests are generally of concern to the United States, the benefits from this mutually supporting relationship serves both European and United States interests. In order to influence actions within Europe and near regions, the United States needs the strategic flexibility that Europe provides as a launching platform, reinforcement base and re-supplying depot.⁵² If European nations are not willing to confront rogue nations, the United States may if interests so dictate. In order to do so, the United States must have use of power projection assets in Europe.

EUROPEAN ISSUES

In order to understand the strategic necessity of positioning United States forces in Europe, a knowledge of European issues is necessary. Europeans have a different internal makeup (conglomeration of nation states each with strong national autonomy proponents) than the United States.⁵³ Europeans also have a divergent outlook on their position in the world. They are seeking economic stability via the European Union and are confronted with significant internal social challenges that are just beginning to rear their heads.⁵⁴

As Europe embraces the European Union (EU), while simultaneously expanding NATO's membership, it is paramount to keep in mind that the individual nation state in Europe will not commit itself totally to the common good of NATO. The nationalism internal to each country will not permit it to make this commitment.⁵⁵ This nationalistic outlook manifests itself in two areas. First of all, European nations spend minimal dollars on defense. Secondly, the minimal dollars spent on defense provide for territorial integrity instead of investing in the common good of NATO.⁵⁶ This has strategic implications for NATO and the United States, as it means NATO's capabilities (strategic lift for example), which could be a significant combat multiplier, will continue to lag behind requirements.

Within this European nationalism there also resides an inferiority complex.⁵⁷ As European countries find themselves falling further and further behind the United States, with

respect to their own military capabilities, they could further reduce defense investments and fall even further behind. As these countries begin to contemplate themselves unable to operate in conjunction with United States military forces, their desire to invest in defense further decreases. This results in essentially a death spiral as their perception of inferiority increases and the inter-operability gap becomes even wider. Of concern to the United States is along with this inter-operability gap, which begets a multitude of problems during the conduct of operations, resentment may arise. This resentment in turn could breed unwanted technological transfers in the form of NATO members selling United States technology they currently possess to nations unfriendly to the United States.⁵⁸

It is essential to keep in mind that an economically strong Europe is critical to the United States.⁵⁹ This criticality stems not only from Europe being an invaluable investment and trading partner, but also because a strong Europe is capable of dealing with both internal and external shocks.⁶⁰ With respect to internal shocks, in the near future the majority of European nations will have to deal with the significant burden of how to pay for their social programs as well as the continued influx of immigrants (primarily Islamic).⁶¹ As previously mentioned, the strong nationalism inherent to European nations will eventually respond to the non-European immigration that threatens to become the majority. Additionally, a strong Europe, as evident by its desire to take on and resolve ethnic issues such as in Kosovo and in the Balkans can mitigate regional flare-ups before they evolve into significant destabilizing confrontations involving all of NATO.

The advent of a 60,000 man force, under the direction of the EU, whose mission is military operations other than war is encouraging.⁶² With a stated purpose different from NATO's mission of high intensity combat operations, this EU force can go a long way to giving Europe the ability to provide a viable military capability in concert with its diplomatic and economic powers. Additionally, the establishment and sustainment of this EU force should work to minimize the inter-operability gap between Europe and the United States and maybe even lead to the pooling of assets within the EU member nations. While efforts to develop such an entity are commendable, it is hard to conceive such a force as these same European countries (for the most part) have struggled to meet NATO defense funding requirements.⁶³ However, if this initiative is successful the increase in defense spending, albeit under the guise of EU membership, will also improve the military capabilities of NATO.

UNITED STATES INTERESTS/THREATS

While the United States has several interests, first and foremost is its continued status as a “Great Power”.⁶⁴ In doing so it must identify and contain nations or coalitions that could present a risk; while simultaneously projecting global power. At this point in time there is no visible threat to United States “Great Power” global influence until 2015.⁶⁵ Keeping this in mind, in order to preserve its status as a “Great Power”, the United States must continue to identify interests and threats across the globe and determine the ways and means to deal with them.

The United States interests, with respect to Europe, consist of: the rise of the EU as an economic hegemonic power; NATO burden sharing; GWOT; NATO's capability gap; and the projection of global power. Though the United States can influence some of these interests directly by using its elements of national power (diplomatic, information, military and economic), only by participating in NATO via direct influence can the United States apply the right influence to address these concerns.⁶⁶

The rise of a strong and viable EU, while important to United States economic prosperity, is also a concern due to not only the economic power it can wield but also its influence on NATO.⁶⁷ The projected development of a European 60,000 man military force that is not part of NATO, but a potential tool of the EU is the basis of this concern. Although the advent of this EU force is most likely good for NATO, it could lead to friction between NATO and the EU if it has to compete with NATO for resources. While each entity (the EU force and NATO) currently has separate missions identified, the EU military force can not be allowed to supersede NATO's role.⁶⁸ If this EU force becomes a competitor of NATO for resources and missions, then the relevance of NATO is at risk and with it the influence the United States has within Europe.⁶⁹

While the rise of the EU into a potential economic power is of interest to the United States, it is important to keep in mind that the EU is the United States number one trading and investment partner. In the short run this may remain the status quo but in the long run, as Russia develops its economic capabilities and influence, this could change. That is why it is vital that the United States stay engaged with Europe economically, politically and militarily. The potential loss of the EU as the United States largest trading and investment partner, coupled with the growth of Russia as an economic power could have immense and unfavorable economic implications for the United States.⁷⁰

Inherent within NATO are certain responsibilities that all member nations share. These responsibilities are: burden sharing, alliance support, anti-terrorism and the anti-proliferation of WMD.⁷¹ Burden sharing and alliance support are responsibilities that are and will continue to be

historic friction points. The anti-proliferation of WMD as well as expanding the GWOT are efforts that NATO must quickly embrace in order to affect a solution. With Europe being used as a hub/projection platform for global terrorism, increased efforts in isolating these terrorist cells and halting the proliferation of WMD are inherent responsibilities/missions for all NATO members.⁷²

The issue of a NATO capability gap due to increases in United States technology and force projection capabilities is a concern, although one with two sides. On the positive side the United States ability to act unilaterally brings with it certain advantages. First, it provides the United States a certain amount of leverage in selecting and conducting these operations. Second, by demonstrating its capabilities the United States secures its position as a “Great Power”. On the down side, this unilateral capability the United States possesses can quickly result in the determination that the United States is always the force of choice; can further decrease defense investment within European nations because they can never catch up; can create technological transfer problems; and could possibly create operational problems for multi-national NATO maneuver forces that result in mission failure. It is important to remember; however, that despite inter-operability problems, the United States desires multi-national operations and in most instances invests considerable time and effort in building coalitions.

While the United States today is not confronted with the same external or internal dynamics of the 1960s and 1970s (civil unrest, political upheaval, and military disappointments) it is important that the United States sustain its role as a “Great Power” if it is to favorably influence world events. In order to do so there is a need for the United States to demonstrate the ability to project global power. While at face value it may appear narcissistic in nature, the image of United States military forces on the ground in Europe and participating in support of NATO operations is vital to United States strategic interests. In order to influence world events, a nation must be visible and participatory.

Today the United States has over 100,000 men and women of the armed forces currently stationed in or serving around the European Continent.⁷³ This number is roughly one-third of the force that was stationed in Europe at the height of the Cold War.⁷⁴ What do these 100,000 armed services personnel providing a forward military presence in Europe represent? They demonstrate the United States continued commitment to NATO.⁷⁵ While it is not the intention of this paper to digress into force ratios or analyze whether 100,000 United States military personnel is the correct number to demonstrate United States commitment to NATO, this figure does appear acceptable to NATO members.

ANALYSIS

This analysis focuses on examining the advantages and disadvantages of a continued United States forward military presence in Europe with respect to whether or not such a forward presence supports American strategic interests. This paper will address the advantages of a continued forward military presence in Europe and then address the disadvantages. What is not addressed is the cost to the United States of having forces deployed or stationed in the United States. Research indicated that unless forces were inactivated there are no savings.⁷⁶ Assuming that the United States current force structure is required to meet its National Military Strategy and that no reduction in military forces is envisioned, assessing financial benefits against the multitude of tangible variables (such as stationing costs, PCS costs, or the impact on foreign military sales) was neither viable nor critical to a conclusion.

ADVANTAGES OF A FORWARD MILITARY PRESENCE

There are numerous advantages to a continued forward military presence in Europe: the ability to influence both the European community as well as NATO operations; forward defense of the United States; global strategic flexibility; ability to affect coalition building; participation in engagement programs such as partnership for peace; and flexibility in fighting the GWOT. The following paragraphs will amplify these benefits.

While all these advantages are vital to American strategic interests, the most important is the influence it provides the United States within the European Community.⁷⁷ This influence allows the United States to project American values and strategic objectives in both NATO operations as well as EU activities. Any further decrease in the United States military presence in Europe may put the United States ability to retain its leadership position within NATO and thus United States influence at risk. Without this influence, the United States could find itself at significant odds with NATO objectives. It is difficult to advocate your position when your “dog in the fight” is 6,000 miles away.

With respect to forward defense, by having our armed forces in Europe we are in essence protecting our sea lines of communication to Europe and thus projecting the United States border. This border projection provides geo-strategic flexibility and certainly is in concert with Mahan’s tenants with respect to defending America.⁷⁸ The advantage that arises is not only preservation of our sea lines of communication but also defense in depth that offers time to react to a threat. Also, by demonstrating our ability to perform as a “Great Power” we demonstrate our power projection capabilities to potential rogue nations.

Global strategic flexibility is one of the primary strategic values that Europe offers. The ability of being able to quickly respond to a regional crisis, either in support of NATO or unilaterally is invaluable. This additional global reach that European access provides, combined with a forward military presence, affords United States decision makers and military campaign planners numerous options. The flexibility afforded via this forward military presence was vital in securing victory during Desert Storm and will prove beneficial if operations in the Middle East become necessary again.⁷⁹

The United States may have the ability to conduct unilateral operations, but for scenarios that entail long term nation building and/or peace-keeping operations the United States remains dependant on allies or coalitions to provide assistance and offset the expense of such missions.⁸⁰ Additionally, the support of allies or use of coalitions helps to legitimize our actions with respect to world opinion. It is a fundamental aspect of United States culture to stringently avoid long term commitment of our forces when possible.⁸¹ Additionally, it is vital to preclude having United States military forces partitioned out to the point of not being able to meet the United States national military strategy requirements.

In order to effect these coalitions, the United States must be positioned to build trust and rapport. This only occurs via day to day interface, cooperation, and demonstrated commitment by each party. The ability to build coalitions within Europe is difficult now. Without a military presence in Europe it can only become harder.⁸² Another benefit of interacting with each other on a consistent basis is that some degree of inter-operability is achieved. A side benefit achieved through this interaction is that the capability gap becomes measurable and correctly integrated into operational plans. It is far better to find operational gaps during training vice under combat conditions.

A forward military presence in Europe also provides the United States the ability to conduct cost-effective engagement programs such as partnership for peace.⁸³ These engagement programs are critical to projecting United States values and democratic ideals. By such engagement programs, NATO and the United States can hope to prevent regional conflicts as well as alleviate Russian concerns about the expansion of NATO.⁸⁴

Lastly, with Europe a center of gravity for terrorist activities as well as its proximity to states that sponsor terrorism, it is essential that the United States retain the flexibility to interdict these activities.⁸⁵ A forward military presence in Europe provides such an opportunity. Additionally, these forces are a visible signal to terrorists that the United States is not willing to take refuge within its own walls.

DISADVANTAGES OF A FORWARD PRESENCE

There are numerous disadvantages to having a forward military presence in Europe: easier to become entangled in European affairs; legal concerns; force protection issues; and no incentive for European nations to increase defense investment. The following paragraphs will address the disadvantages of having forces forward deployed in Europe.

While the NATO charter provides significant flexibility in addressing the degree of participation a member nation has to provide in meeting its NATO commitment, having an American serving in a leadership position and forces in the area of operations implies a degree of commitment.⁸⁶ By not being in a NATO leadership position nor having a military presence in Europe, the United States can avoid a quick “knee jerk” reaction solely due to the time that is needed to transport United States forces across the Atlantic. This expanse of time will allow the situation to develop and provide United States decision makers a degree of flexibility. The threat of becoming involved in military operations because we can do so quickly and seemingly effortlessly is real, as evidenced by United States military operations in the Balkans and Kosovo.

The legal ability of host nations in Europe to prevent American forces from using their countries as a deployment platform is credible. It was determined that based on agreements covering American bases, Germany has the legal authority to block operations not in support of NATO.⁸⁷ To think that United States forces could be marginalized in such a manner screams for an immediate withdrawal of forces in Europe. By not having American forces in Europe there are no legal issues to disrupt deployments. This flexibility is needed and mandatory to ensure immediate and full use of the military's capabilities.

Force protection of our military, especially since 9/11, is of paramount concern. Having forces stationed overseas puts them at risk as they are more visible and an easily reached target for terrorists. While bringing our forces home will not negate force protection requirements, it will at least remove them from close proximity to terrorist centers.

Lastly, by having United States forces forward deployed there is no incentive for European nations to increase their investment in defense.⁸⁸ Returning American military forces to the United States should force Europe to increase defense expenditures to fill the void created by United States force reductions. Economic theory governing public goods and services predicts that Europe should increase its defense spending.⁸⁹ This theory holds that with respect to defense, price has no effect on demand (defense is a tangible need basic to national survival and thus required at any price). Based on this theory, given the defense void created by the United States withdrawal of forces, Europe would increase its defense spending.

Another potential outcome is that European countries would begin to pool resources and develop the capabilities necessary to meet their defense requirements, to include those requirements necessary to meet NATO's expanding force projection role, given a reduction in United States forces in Europe.⁹⁰ This in itself is an inducement for the United States to reduce force levels in Europe in an attempt to achieve equitable defense burden sharing within NATO.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on research and the above analysis, the United States should continue its forward military presence in Europe at current force structure levels for the foreseeable future. This recommendation is based on the following four outcomes of having United States military forces stationed in Europe: expeditious access into that region of the world; basis for cooperation between European countries and the United States; the ability to influence events in that region of the world; and an exercised and appropriate military inter-operability capability that strengthens NATO's ability to accomplish its mission. United States forward military presence in Europe will continue to provide significant influence both within and external to the European continent as well as overwhelming strategic flexibility in support of the GWOT and confrontations with rogue nations in the surrounding area. Additionally, the access and influence achieved are vital to the sustainment of United States "Great Power" status and the conduct of the GWOT. These effects provide insurmountable benefits when weighed against the disadvantages of having United States military forces forward deployed in Europe.

WORD COUNT =6036

ENDNOTES

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